

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

In the Matter of:ACCIDENT OF THE LADY D
ON MARCH 6, 2004
in Baltimore, Maryland

Docket No. DCA 04 MM015

Monday,
March 8, 2004

INTERVIEW OF:

EILEEN ROCCELLA

PRESENT:

MORGAN J. TURRELL, NTSB
MARIETTE BURER
CORPORAL SHOCKEY
SCOTT BURNOWSKI

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TURRELL: Good

morning, this is Morgan Turrell of the NTSB. We are at Johns Hopkins Hospital interviewing a patient who was a passenger aboard the water taxi in the accident on Saturday, March 6.

We are going to do a witness interview. The patient is in the hospital and we have received permission to interview her.

My name is Morgan Turrell, National Transportation Safety Board, and with me to my right?

LIEUTENANT BURNOWSKI: Lieutenant Scott Burnowski, U.S. Coast Guard Sector, Baltimore.

CORPORAL SHOCKEY: Corporal Shockey, Maryland Natural Resource Police.

MS. BURER: Mariette Burer, NTSB.

MR. TURRELL: And if you would please introduce yourself, and same you name and spell it.

MS. ROCCELLA: My name is Eileen Roccella. The first name is E-I-L-E-E-N. The last name is spelled, R-O-C-C-E-L-L-A.

MR. TURRELL: Okay. And Ms. Roccella, how old are you?

MS. ROCCELLA: Fifty nine.

1 MR. TURRELL: And where do you reside?

2 MS. ROCCELLA: Vienna, Virginia.

3 MR. TURRELL: And can you tell us if you were
4 onboard the water taxi on Saturday, March 6?

5 MS. ROCCELLA: I was onboard, yes.

6 MR. TURRELL: And I understand you had some
7 family with you at the time.

8 MS. ROCCELLA: My son, his girlfriend and his
9 girlfriend's parents. And our son and girlfriend are
10 the two adults that are missing.

11 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And Ms. Roccella, if you
12 would please tell us in your own words, starting from
13 when you boarded the water taxi, what your experienced?

14 MS. ROCCELLA: The water was very choppy that
15 day, because when we went out it was choppy. And the
16 sky was getting very dark and this was suppose to be
17 the last boat to get us back to Fells Point, where we
18 would connect with another boat to bring us back to the
19 Harbor. Then we waited and we were boarded, and we all
20 sat down and it took off and it started raining almost
21 immediately after that. And then it proceeded to get
22 worse.

23 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

24 MS. ROCCELLA: I mean, the course of events, I
25 remember at one point in time the boat did keel and

1 people did get up to try to straighten it out and then
2 they sat back down. And I believe, this is correct,
3 the sequence of events is kind of blurred in my mind,
4 but, I think the captain did try, he did turn the boat
5 and then it turned again, and then in a matter of
6 seconds, it just flipped. And then there was no chance
7 to think, or do anything. It was very, very rapid.

8 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

9 MS. ROCCELLA: I knew I was under water, and I
10 am not a swimmer, and I thought for sure I was going to
11 die. And I just started kicking and I, I did see
12 lights and I kicked towards the light and I popped up
13 out of the water, and there were life jackets floating
14 around and I tried to grab one and every time I would
15 reach, the wave would come over and push me down. And
16 then at that point, I don't know if someone grabbed me,
17 but, I got close to the boat and there were two
18 gentlemen on the boat and I remember them saying, you
19 know, you know, reach out, we will pull you in, and I
20 knew my arm was broken, and I couldn't with my right
21 arm, so they pulled me up with my left arm. And at
22 some point my, my son's girlfriend's mother was sitting
23 next to me. I don't know that all happened. And she
24 was hugging me. And then we were screaming for people
25 to help on shore to come get us. And fortunately, from

1 what I understand, the Navy was out on a patrol, and
2 they came with their boat.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

4 MS. ROCCELLA: And they dropped the side and
5 threw a rope, I remember and the first time, no one
6 could get it and then the second time, these two guys
7 onboard were able to hold it. And then after that it
8 is really kind of a blur. I remember getting on that
9 boat, which was very difficult because the water was
10 very choppy. And I remember them bringing a little
11 girl out of the water and performing CPR and I don't
12 know if she was alive. And my son's girlfriend's
13 father was in the water right behind me and he was
14 holding on. And I didn't know where my husband was.
15 And later on I saw that he was down at the other end of
16 the boat helping out. And then they couldn't find our
17 kids. They never surfaced. I don't understand how
18 that happened.

19 MR. TURRELL: Okay. So it sounds like your arm
20 was hurt in the accident.

21 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

22 MR. TURRELL: And not during the rescue.

23 MS. ROCCELLA: It was during the accident.

24 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

25 MS. ROCCELLA: Because, when I was being

1 rescued, my arm was broke. My shoulder actually, but I
2 knew I couldn't move it.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Can you tell me to the
4 best of your knowledge where you sitting on the boat?

5 MS. ROCCELLA: I was in the back, as you were
6 looking towards the front of the boat, I was in the
7 boat on the left. My husband was right next to me, he
8 was the first person in the back. And there was a door
9 there, and then I was next. I can't remember if my son
10 and his girlfriend were next to me or his parents. I
11 don't remember, I don't remember that. There was a
12 young couple across from us. I remember, I think they
13 were rescued.

14 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Do you recall seeing,
15 well, besides the eight year old that you saw after,
16 the young girl afterwards, do you recall seeing other
17 children in the boat?

18 MS. ROCCELLA: I saw a family huddled together
19 with a child and they were holding each other, just
20 holding onto each other. This was on the rescue boat,
21 not the pontoon.

22 MR. TURRELL: Okay. On the actual boarding of
23 the actual pontoon boat.

24 MS. ROCCELLA: The pontoon.

25 MR. TURRELL: Do you recall seeing children at

1 all?

2 MS. ROCCELLA: No.

3 MR. TURRELL: You weren't paying attention.

4 MS. ROCCELLA: No, no. No. Karen, the
5 coordinator came up and she did the announcements.

6 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

7 MS. ROCCELLA: And, and, no, the yelling for
8 help, I remember that.

9 MR. TURRELL: Sure.

10 MS. ROCCELLA: Just telling people to hurry,
11 because if they weren't there, I don't think any of us
12 would have been rescued. The water was very rough.

13 MR. TURRELL: Right.

14 MS. ROCCELLA: And if is fortunate they were
15 there to save as many people as they did.

16 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

17 MS. ROCCELLA: Because the boat, I think,
18 drifted out.

19 MR. TURRELL: Yeah, quite a bit.

20 MS. ROCCELLA: Quite a bit.

21 MR. TURRELL: So, can you take me through the
22 sequence of when the boat, when you first sensed that
23 the boat was keeling and the passengers were moving,
24 which side of the boat, when you were sitting in your
25 seat, which side of the boat moved in towards the water

1 initially?

2 MS. ROCCELLA: The people across, there were a
3 couple of men that got up, on the other side, and go up
4 to steady the boat and then they sat down.

5 MR. TURRELL: So they moved from the right
6 side of the boat --

7 MS. ROCCELLA: To the left side.

8 MR. TURRELL: To the left side.

9 MS. ROCCELLA: And then they sat down.

10 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

11 MS. ROCCELLA: At that point I think the boat
12 was turned. I think that is correct.

13 MR. TURRELL: So when you say they sat
14 down --

15 MS. ROCCELLA: Because I was very frightened,
16 at this point I knew it was, it wasn't a good thing.
17 There was a big clap of thunder, I remember hearing
18 that.

19 MR. TURRELL: There was a big clap of thunder.

20 MS. ROCCELLA: It was a clap of thunder, the
21 sky was very dark. It was raining very hard.

22 MR. TURRELL: When you noticed this rain storm
23 came through, did it obscure visibility, did you see
24 any landmarks for the Fort around you?

25 MS. ROCCELLA: Couldn't see the Fort, because

1 the Fort would be behind us.

2 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

3 MS. ROCCELLA: What you could see would be,
4 from my standpoint, you couldn't see -- and there was a
5 factory or something.

6 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

7 MS. ROCCELLA: But, I don't think I was paying
8 attention. I was quite frightened.

9 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

10 MS. ROCCELLA: At that point. And that is, I
11 was very frightened.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay. When the passengers
13 returned to their seats and sat down again on the right
14 side of the boat, and then again the boat turned, and
15 then the boat started yielding again to flip over.

16 MS. ROCCELLA: That was very, very rapid.

17 MR. TURRELL: Very rapid.

18 MS. ROCCELLA: Very.

19 MR. TURRELL: And it was the starboard side
20 that went in the water first.

21 MS. ROCCELLA: I believe so, but, I am not
22 sure. It was very quick. I don't remember that. I
23 just remember it happening very rapidly.

24 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

25 MS. ROCCELLA: And I didn't even have a chance

1 to grab onto my husband, it happened so quickly. I
2 don't remember which way it went.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And the canopy was in
4 tact.

5 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

6 MR. TURRELL: And when it hit the water, did
7 you, were you enclosed in the boat --

8 MS. ROCCELLA: I don't remember.

9 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

10 MS. ROCCELLA: That I don't remember. I just
11 remember thinking that I was going to die, that was,
12 this was it. That we were all doing to die. It was
13 very dark, you couldn't, the water is very murky.

14 MR. TURRELL: Sure, sure.

15 MS. ROCCELLA: And I don't know if there was
16 anything around me at all. But, the roof was in tact,
17 I think the girl across from me, she had opened the
18 window a little bit, but when it started raining, I
19 think she closed it.

20 MR. TURRELL: Were other windows open --

21 MS. ROCCELLA: Probably because it started
22 getting very cold.

23 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

24 MS. ROCCELLA: And when that storm came
25 through the temperature must have dropped.

1 MR. TURRELL: Right.

2 MS. ROCCELLA: And it got very cold. And I
3 think she closed the window.

4 MR. TURRELL: And whereabouts was the window?

5 MS. ROCCELLA: It was the very last window in
6 the back.

7 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

8 MS. ROCCELLA: The door.

9 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

10 MS. ROCCELLA: If she closed completely, I
11 don't know, but, she had it open at first, and then I
12 think she did close it. She sat, when we left, sat in
13 the same spot when we went out there to Fells Point,
14 that couple sat in that same spot.

15 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

16 MS. ROCCELLA: And --

17 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

18 MS. ROCCELLA: I remember my husband
19 commenting on the engine, that it was a Honda engine.

20 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Can you tell me about the
21 crew, any crew that you saw on the boat, describe them?

22 MS. ROCCELLA: It was, I guess the person that
23 was actually in charge of the vessel, and then there
24 was a gentleman, and he was standing up most of the
25 time.

1 MR. TURRELL: And can you roughly tell me from
2 where you were, was he standing forward of you?

3 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

4 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And at any time when you
5 boarded the boat during the day, because you took the
6 boat one time before.

7 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

8 MR. TURRELL: Did you ever hear the mate or
9 captain address you as a passenger or address the
10 passengers as whole, did they talk to you in any way or
11 tell you anything?

12 MS. ROCCELLA: About what?

13 MR. TURRELL: About the boat, or your
14 destination or --

15 MS. ROCCELLA: Well, we knew we were going to
16 Fort McHenry.

17 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

18 MS. ROCCELLA: And that would be the last
19 boat, it would be leaving at four o'clock.

20 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Did they tell you anything
21 else, describe the boat or anything about the boat?
22 Location of life jackets?

23 MS. ROCCELLA: They did tell us about the life
24 jackets, the life jackets were under the seat and on
25 top.

1 MR. TURRELL: And when you say on top, was
2 there, I mean, on top inside the cabin or on top of the
3 boat?

4 MS. ROCCELLA: On top inside the cabin.

5 MR. TURRELL: Inside the cabin.

6 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

7 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And so, how, how long was
8 this briefing this person, the mate, I assume the mate
9 or the captain?

10 MS. ROCCELLA: Not very long, as I recall, not
11 very long.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

13 MS. ROCCELLA: With the ride out was choppy,
14 you know, the water was rough.

15 MR. TURRELL: And they do the same briefing
16 when you boarded the last time?

17 MS. ROCCELLA: I don't believe so. No. He
18 was in a hurry get to back.

19 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Can you tell me, you were
20 all the way at the back of the boat, but you were on
21 the port side, so you could see the operator's console,
22 you could see the captain?

23 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

24 MR. TURRELL: Did you at any time hear or see
25 him on the radio at all?

1 MS. ROCCELLA: You know, I think I did hear a
2 radio.

3 MR. TURRELL: Before the boat went, started
4 turning, did the crew ever give you any instructions,
5 obviously it happened very fast, but, like you said,
6 you were concerned.

7 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

8 MR. TURRELL: Did they at any time express
9 concern for passengers?

10 MS. ROCCELLA: No, I don't believe so.

11 MR. TURRELL: Did they ever give you
12 instructions?

13 MS. ROCCELLA: No, there was no time for
14 instructions.

15 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

16 MS. ROCCELLA: There was just no time to open
17 a door, grab anything.

18 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Do you have any sense of
19 how far from shore you had traveled or how many minutes
20 or --

21 MS. ROCCELLA: No, I don't know, I don't think
22 we had traveled that far. They tend to go towards the
23 middle.

24 MR. TURRELL: Right.

25 MS. ROCCELLA: Instead of going along the

1 shore.

2 MR. TURRELL: Right.

3 MS. ROCCELLA: And they head out towards, I
4 guess that is their normal route. We were not out very
5 long, because it started to rain almost immediately.

6 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Did you have a chance to
7 see any other boats pass by when this event happened?

8 MS. ROCCELLA: No, just the rescue boat.

9 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

10 MS. ROCCELLA: And I was in a great deal of
11 pain, and I finally got on the pontoon. Of course, the
12 motion of the boat made it worse.

13 MR. TURRELL: Did you ever hear any passengers
14 when you saw the dark sky, did any passengers make any
15 remarks out loud or to you about the weather?

16 MS. ROCCELLA: No. Not I can recall.

17 MR. TURRELL: Did you see any discussion with
18 the captain or the mate?

19 MS. ROCCELLA: No, I did not.

20 MR. TURRELL: Okay. I am going to turn the
21 questioning over to the gentleman from the Coast Guard,
22 Scott. Go ahead.

23 LIEUTENANT BURNOWSKI: I don't have any
24 questions right now.

25 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Mariette.

1 MS. BURER: I do have one question, when you
2 were talking about the two gentlemen that stood up and
3 moved from one side to the other, is that something
4 that they automatically just did or were they asked by
5 someone else to move?

6 MS. ROCCELLA: I don't know if the mate asked
7 them, it wasn't, I don't know the number, it might have
8 been more than two.

9 MS. BURER: Okay. Maybe he did, I don't know
10 if he did or not.

11 MS. BURER: Okay.

12 MS. ROCCELLA: But, they did get up from and
13 then they sat right back down.

14 MS. BURER: In the same spot where they were.

15 MS. ROCCELLA: Where they were, yes. As far
16 as I remember, yes.

17 MS. BURER: Okay.

18 MS. ROCCELLA: Because I think I was, when
19 that happened, I think I might have been looking, maybe
20 to my husband.

21 MS. BURER: Right.

22 MS. ROCCELLA: And then I turned and, you
23 know, it was very frightening at that point.

24 MS. BURER: Okay. And --

25 MS. ROCCELLA: We were all terrified.

1 MS. BURER: Do you remember anything else as
2 far as what they told you to do or did they just point
3 at where the life jackets were and give a safety
4 briefing or --

5 MS. ROCCELLA: Just where they were located. I
6 don't know if the children's were, there were some on
7 the top, and the rest were under the seats.

8 MS. BURER: Right. Did they distinguish the
9 difference between children and --

10 MS. ROCCELLA: I am not sure about that.

11 MS. BURER: Okay.

12 MS. ROCCELLA: Maybe they did, but I am not
13 positive. Not having a child with me, I didn't pay
14 attention to what was going on for a child.

15 MS. BURER: Right, right.

16 MS. ROCCELLA: But, I knew the others were
17 under the seat.

18 MS. BURER: Okay.

19 MR. TURRELL: No other questions? One last
20 question, do you recall the passengers who got up and
21 moved, can you tell me if they were sitting forward
22 from you or --

23 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

24 MR. TURRELL: Or immediately, how far forward
25 they were sitting?

1 MS. ROCCELLA: I think in the middle of the
2 boat, towards the front, from what I recall.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

4 MS. ROCCELLA: I was in the middle, I turned
5 my head and they were up already.

6 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

7 MS. ROCCELLA: And then they were told, I
8 don't know if they were told or then they sat down.

9 MR. TURRELL: Okay. So, they were, they were
10 basically behind the operator's console.

11 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And do you recall how far
13 to, just how far to the port side did they actually
14 get? Did they get to the middle of the boat, did they
15 move all the way across?

16 MS. ROCCELLA: I think they came over to the
17 side, you mean the middle of the aisle?

18 MR. TURRELL: Right. If there was a right
19 side of the boat from the middle and the left side of
20 the boat, do you recall how far across --

21 MS. ROCCELLA: I think they came over and
22 probably, I don't know if they reached up, because it
23 was not steady.

24 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

25 MS. ROCCELLA: And then they were sitting --

1 MR. TURRELL: They made it all the way over to
2 the left side and then returned.

3 MS. ROCCELLA: I remember they returned to
4 their seats.

5 MR. TURRELL: And the last question I have for
6 you is, can you describe, compared to the other water
7 taxis that you rode that day, the general condition of
8 the boat?

9 MS. ROCCELLA: This one was much smaller than
10 the one we came over on from the Harbor.

11 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

12 MS. ROCCELLA: That one was larger. This one,
13 also, when we were going out, there was a screw in the
14 middle of it, that the water pushed up and the screw
15 came out. And there was water coming in at the time.
16 It didn't seem to have any -- And I know it was the
17 pontoon, so, the water does come in and out, I am sure
18 of the pontoon. But, it was towards the back, where
19 the plates are connected, one of the screws just popped
20 up, and water just pushed it up and every time we would
21 come down and hit probably a large wave, water would
22 shoot up, but then it would just run off.

23 MR. TURRELL: Right. Was this like near your
24 feet or was --

25 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

2 MS. ROCCELLA: Yes. It was a much smaller
3 boat than the one we went out on. The one that goes to
4 Fells Point was larger.

5 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And as far as the, did you
6 notice what condition of the boat, did it appear to be
7 in good shape?

8 MS. ROCCELLA: Well, it was old, an old boat.

9 MR. TURRELL: Okay. I have nothing further
10 right now. I really appreciate your -- In the tape
11 interview right now and ask you to write down, or I
12 will write down for you some information where we can
13 contact you in the future.

14 MS. ROCCELLA: Okay.

15 MR. TURRELL: Would you please acknowledge it
16 has been recorded and we will end the interview?

17 MS. ROCCELLA: This has been recorded.

18 MR. TURRELL: Thank you.

19 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)